

Media consolidation is a bad idea for America, and the threats are more than abstract speculation. Sinclair Broadcasting's recent decision to compel stations to air a partisan political documentary in the days preceding a presidential election is an example of the abuses that can result from consolidation. By no coincidence, the company is using public airwaves to influence an election in favor of a candidate aligned with the company's business interests.

Broadcasters are given a gift of great value in being allowed to use public airwaves for free, and are expected to serve the public interest in exchange. But this gift can be taken for granted by broadcasters when they are allowed to let profit overshadow public interest obligations.

It's not just a matter of fairness. When a broadcaster uses a public resource such as the airwaves to promote a political point-of-view or candidate that benefits its bottom line, it tampers with fair elections and American democracy itself.

Unfortunately, relaxing rules on media ownership promotes this sort of abuse by encouraging large corporations to own many widely-dispersed media outlets, undermining local control and accountability to communities.

Sinclair's actions show why we need to strengthen media ownership rules, not weaken them.